

## Don't Let the Door Hit You on Your Way Out by rosekings

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**Summary:**

*“They’re your kids too, Ted!” his mom yells. Her hair is slipping out of its curlers and there’s makeup smeared on her face. “Your kids!”*

*“So what?” Mike’s dad looks more agitated and annoyed than angry. Mike doesn’t know which is worse.*

# Don't Let the Door Hit You on Your Way Out

## Author's Note:

Warnings for fighting, verbal abuse, and divorce.

March, 1985

Mike comes home at the wrong time. Sure, there's never really a 'right' time, but this one is definitely worse than usual. He opens the door and steps inside after getting home from school one sunny afternoon, like normal. He kicks off his shoes and hangs up his jacket, like normal. And he's about to go down to the basement to begin planning the party's next D&D campaign, *like normal*, when he hears the yelling.

Very rarely is there yelling. Any fights in the Wheeler household are usually between Mike's mom and Nancy, and they only last a couple of minutes, ending with a door slam from Nancy and a huff from their mom. But this is different, Mike realizes as he peeks around the corner. Both his mom and his dad are screaming at the top of their lungs.

"They're your kids too, Ted!" his mom yells. Her hair is slipping out of its curlers and there's makeup smeared on her face. "Your kids!"

"So what?" Mike's dad looks more agitated and annoyed than angry. Mike doesn't know which is worse. "They have friends! They don't need us!"

"Why is it so hard for you to get off of your lazy ass for *once in a while*? I try as hard as I can to connect with Mike, to connect with Nancy, but they're so distant and private and you aren't helping at *all*!"

"They're kids, Karen! They're going to lie and hide and sneak out because that's what kids *do*."

Mike briefly feels a pang of guilt. He *has* been distant, but it's because his home environment is not somewhere he's comfortable, precisely

because of the constant tension between his parents. And his mom isn't trying her hardest, he knows that. When Nancy gets home and gives some dismal answer to the "Where have you been?" question, their mom gets irritated quickly and gives up. If Mike is being honest with himself, he's kind of been expecting this blowup for some time now.

His mom swipes a tear away from her eye, glancing to make sure the windows are closed. *God forbid the neighbors hear*, Mike thinks. "Don't you care about them at *all*? Don't you want our kids to be healthy and happy?"

"They seem like they're doing fine without us, Karen!"

"Mike was going through such a hard time," his mom says between a breakout of sobs. "He was cheating on his schoolwork and wouldn't talk to anyone but his friends and he was so *angry* at me, all the time, and I didn't know what to do, and you didn't even notice! And Nancy \_"

At that moment, Mike's sister opens the door and he swings around the corner, bringing a finger to his lips. She gets the message, the fighting reaching her ears, and after she shuts the door quietly they lean against the wall, listening.

" - I don't know where the *hell* Nancy goes all day. To be with Steve Harrington, to be with that Byers boy, to be at school, to be anywhere but with us, because she hates us! Both of them hate us! Doesn't that say something about what we're *doing* with our lives?"

Mike can't see, but it sounds like his dad takes a deep breath. "It's not our fault, Karen. They're teenagers, it's up to them to decide -"

"*No it's not!*" Karen screams. "It isn't! It's up to *us* to be there for them! Last year somebody told me that some juniors from school graffitied 'Nancy 'The Slut' Wheeler' on the movie theater! Nancy never said a word about it because she doesn't trust us at all!"

"Well, maybe she is!"

Next to him, Nancy's breathing stops for a moment. Around the

corner, Mike can *feel* the frozen tension.

“What did you just say?” his mom whispers.

“Maybe she is a slut! Maybe that’s where she is all day and she actually is doing drugs and whoring around and that’s *her problem!*”

Nancy’s hand goes to her mouth. Mike can see the sadness and the pain in her eyes. “Nance -” he mutters, but she shakes her head.

“Get out,” their mom demands.

“What?”

“I said - get - the hell - out - of my - house!” Mike glances around the corner just in time to see his mother yank her wedding ring off her finger and hurl it at her husband. “You can take this back - and you can *leave!*”

Ted stares at Karen for a minute, but his disbelief quickly gives way to anger again. “Fine.” He storms out of the living room and catches sight of his two kids. To Nancy’s credit, she’s not crying. Mike can feel her shaking with rage as she opens the door for her dad. Ted looks at Mike, but Mike feels nothing but loathing. After a brief stare-down, Mike and Nancy’s father leaves and Nancy slams the door behind him.

Mike peers into the living room. His mom is collapsed in a crying heap on the floor. “Mom...?” he ventures. Karen lifts her head to look at him and Nancy.

“I’m sorry, kids. I’m - I’m really sorry.”

“It’s okay, Mom,” Nancy says. “It’s about time.”

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The last time Mike sees his father is when he comes to collect his things two days later. Nancy had left an hour earlier so she wouldn’t have to talk to him again. Karen and Mike stand in the kitchen, silently watching him pack up. Finally, his hand is on the doorknob and he’s looking back at his wife and child.

"I'm not coming back," he says, as if it will convince them to get on their knees and beg him to stay.

"We're not inviting you back," says Karen. "Have a good life, Ted. Don't let the door hit you on your way out."

Ted casts one last contempt-filled glance their way and then the door closes. Mike's mom sighs, her tight grip on his hand relaxing.

"I promise, Mike - I promise I'm going to be better. For you, and for Nancy."

Mike gives her a smile. "Thanks, Mom."